



SREE NARAYANAGURU – A SAGE WITH A DIFFERENCE

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ABSTRACT

This paper tries to place Sreenarayana Guru in the context of Kerala modernity. Narayana Guru was one of the well-known social reformers in India. He was a philosopher, a poet, a mystic, and a social revolutionary. He desired to spread the message of the mystic experience and the presence of divine to one and all in society. When the divine has embraced him all kinds of ignorance and inequalities have been destroyed. Then his motive was to destroy inequalities injustice; on the earth. So, his motive was dual, one is to spread the divine message and the second is to destroy inequalities, injustice. When Narayana Guru came on the scene in the mid-19th century Kerala Society was under the clutches of an ugly caste system with all the evil effects, divisions, and sub-divisions based on caste hierarchy. Guru's philosophy generated great influence on marginalized people. His path and commandments discharged energy, which shifted the roots of the existing social order, marginalized stand against the dominant ideology, and ruled out its prohibitions. They demanded a better lifestyle and education. In the realm of the Kerala social reforms, his thoughts generated change which positively shaped masses towards freedom.

KEYWORDS: Atman, Brahman, Brahmadevya, Atmadevya, Avarnas, Archakas, Sanghatana, Dharma, Iswara, Bhakthi, Avidya, Vidya.

INTRODUCTION

There are many studies have observed that the development experience in the State of Kerala has been different from that in other States of India. It has also been pointed out that socio-religious reform movements have had a major role to play in contributing to this distinct development experience. There were a large number of social and religious reformers in Kerala in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, who attracted people from different regions and walks of life towards an agenda of reforms through exhortation, advice, and preaching. Sree Narayana Guru (1855–1928) was one such prominent reformer, and the movement which he inspired, was greatly influential. Based on practical Vedanta, a theory in Hindu philosophy, his method of approach to the reformation was simple and unique.

A few decades ago Kerala was an extreme example of social and economic inequalities- 'a lunatic asylum' in the words of Swami Vivekananda. Over a third of its population was outcastes and treated as untouchables. They have to keep off meters and meters away from high caste Hindus. Educational institutions were not opened to them. Government jobs were denied and temple entry forbidden to them.

Today the picture is quite different in Kerala. But caste still lingers in mind. Education and every sector is opened to all. This transformation was brought about mainly the steps initiated by the great seer Sree Narayana Guru.

His Manifesto thus says that to get physical, mental and spiritual happiness for a community, its member's adherence

to cleanliness, religious customs and morality help to a great extent. Materialism and spiritualism are not two entities. These are both sides of a coin. These two actually work for the same purpose. When all organs in a body work together, the body experience happiness. Similarly to achieve mankind's ultimate aim of happiness material as well as spiritual institutions are to work together.

His social revolution:

It is normally understood that revolution means causing a drastic and far reaching change in the attitude and behavior of the people. It shakes up the existing social order and political system, causes hostilities and bloodshed and passes through chaotic periods of instability and confusion before a semblance of stability settles in. The medieval survival in India was the cast system. In India Sree Buddha was the only one who could effectively fight caste system with his philanthropic and humanitarian outlook. Sree Narayana Guru also effectively fought against the tyranny of caste system in Kerala. His writings Jathilakshanam and Jathinirayam advocated one caste for mankind. He promoted inter dining and inter caste marriage. In 1924 Guru convened an all religious conference in Advadasramam at Aluva. It was the first of its kind in Asia and second in the world (the first one was at Chicago in America which Swamy Vivekananda participated).At the entrance gate he made this social revolutionary message to be written "Neither for debate or nor to win but to know and to let know". The aim of this conference was to expose to the world that the cardinal principle of all religions was one and the same and the ultimate aim is to attain the Self.

His temple revolution:

He knew that the temples are the heart of Hindu religious life and its social manifestation. The temples are the imitation of the cosmic order on earth, a sociological “middle cosmos” established by priest craft between the macrocosm of the universe and the microcosm of the individual. The icons of the temple synthesize both doctrine and sacred presence, both didactic and suggestive of divine power. The temples act as mediums through which devotees approach godhead.

During the Guru's period, Kerala was a land of worst caste discriminations and temples were the live centers to emphasize this. The society was split in to two major divisions, the savarnas (upper caste) and avarnas (lower caste). The avarnas were denied to right to enter or worship in temples. They had to worship only inferior deities like Chathan, Chamundi, Marutha, Maadan etc. The rituals of worship were drunken orgies. All the intoxicating material offered to the deities was consumed by the people after worship and naturally they descended to substandard behavior.

Temple reformation was one of the methods adapted by the Guru to empower the oppressed. He decided to provide the people with a common place for worship where all could come without the restriction of caste, creed or sex and offer prayers. This culminated in the consecration of Lord Siva at Aruvippuram. It was a silent revolution to eliminate all evils in Hindu society and to establish a society based on social equality. In the wall of that temple He wrote his aim

“jathibhedam mathadvasham ethumillathe sarvarum
Sodarathvena vazhunna mathrukasthaanamaanithu”
(This is the model centre where all live in brotherhood,
Free from caste distinctions and religious animosities).

The consecration at Aruvippuram was quickly followed by similar consecration of temples in other parts of Kerala, on the request of his followers. Guru consecrated more than sixty temples in and around Kerala. Through this consecration Guru opened the doors of the temples to all, without any caste distinctions.

The second step which he took to cut the roots of priestly power was a more fundamental concrete step towards establishing human equality. He trained Non-Brahmins in rituals of worship and appointed them as archakas in his temples. He opened a Sanskrit school at Aruvippuram for this purpose. The people were made to realize that Gods and Goddesses were not the monopoly of a few priests.

The third revolutionary step taken by him was the removal of the icons of evil deities from their temples and installing in their place serene deities.

His eight-fold path: For making an ideal society he advocated eight-fold path**1. Education**

Education leads any community to higher standards and, therefore, if we are interested in the welfare of the community,

we have to encourage it. He asked his followers to explain the benefits of education and the loss caused by its lack and encourages the people to see to it with pride that not a single one of either sex went without at least primary education. He asked to enthuse and help people to open schools and libraries wherever necessary.

2. Cleanliness

Cleanliness is the next step to Godliness. He asked the people to keep the mind and body clean. He thus said. “Cleanliness should start from kitchen. Once you keep the body clean, the cleanliness of food and house will follow.

3. Piety (Iswarabhakthi)

He asked the people to have bhakthi for God. He thus said “love for the God who is the father of the world, love for guru, father and mother, love for the truthful son of God, love for those who tread on the path of God and love for those who lead people away from forbidden acts and do acts for the liking of all is called Bhakthi. It is enough if one is having Bhakthi and faith

4. Organisation (Sanghatana)

He asked people to get strengthened through organization. In this era the strength through organization is essential. The working of these organizations shall be intelligent since it shall be the harbinger for all future progress.

5. Agriculture

All shall do agriculture. It is the backbone of the mankind. Agriculture is an important sector of Indian economy as it contributes a major percentage to the total GDP and provides employment to over 60 percent of the population. Not only that, it is the life itself. Agriculture is useful to make money for house-holders.

6. Trade

Sree Narayana Guru thus said: “As a community we were very poor. Improvement is possible only through trade and industry. Though the paths to prosperity are open, men of our community do not have the courage to step out. We are forced to do this because we do not know the manufacturing process. We have to change this situation by sending our children to study in factories.

7. Handicrafts

He stressed the need for development of handicrafts. It shall provide jobs for more people and more utilization of indigenous materials.

8. Scientific and technological training

Nowadays skilled workers are more required. Therefore scientific and technological trainings are essential. It provides jobs not only in this country but also in other countries.

In every year during the pilgrimage to Sivagiri Guru wanted to organize seminars on the above subjects.

Ten Commandments: For making a perfect society he advocated Ten Commandments.

1. Be enlightened with education
2. Be strengthened with organization.
3. Make progress through industry.
4. Don't speak caste, ask caste and think caste.
5. One caste, one religion and one God for mankind.
6. Whatever be the religion, it is sufficient if it is good for mankind.
7. Whatever is the difference in faith, dress or language, as all humanity belongs to one cast, and there is no harm in inter-dining.
8. Do not make liquor, don't drink it and don't sell it.
9. Spend judiciously.
10. Man who knows dharma should work hard for the progress and well being of his neighbor.

LITERARY WORKS

Sree Narayana Guru was a literary genius. He was widely read in three languages, namely Malayalam, Sanskrit and Tamil. All his poems were devotional, philosophical and metaphysical. Narayana Guru has written 35 works in Malayalam and 9 Books in Sanskrit, and one in Tamil. In selection of words, keeping rhymes and expressing incomprehensive philosophical subjects within the apprehension of common man, he had his own style. His aim was to convey the world truths to the common man to the easiest way possible.

His epistemology

In Atmopadesa Satakam stanza 67 guru says "That which is beyond comprehension is one. The other is ordinary. Other than these two, there is no other form at all, either in memory, in sleep, or in the upper plane (heaven)"

Guru divides the world in to two namely the empirical world and the world beyond count. For prosperity of the empirical world, he advocates the material development stressing on education, organization, social equality, agriculture, trade, industry etc. By the world beyond count, he puts forward his spirituality. Sree Narayana Guru by his several years of spiritual experience and philosophical reasoning accepted that the Advaita Vedanta of Adi Sankara. The Advaita philosophy is based on the essential oneness and identity of all life. He said that we should serve man as man, first because everyone belongs to humanity and secondly because that Atman, the reality in man is non-different from Brahman, the ultimate reality. Man should attempt to attain the Ultimate truth by discriminating between reality and unreality. God is the Universal reality behind the world. To realize this basic unity is the supreme goal of man. To attain this Atmavidya (self-knowledge) or Brahavidya, man has to remove the veil of ignorance (Avidya) through knowledge (Vidya).

CONCLUSION

Sree Narayana Guru was a savior of the downtrodden. He was an enlightened humanist and social reformer with a lot of practical wisdom. Believed in the equality of human beings. He firmly advocated the need to empower the poor and downtrodden with knowledge, creativity and compassion. Guru was instrumental

in bringing out a thorough transformation in Kerala society by liberating the poor people from their subhuman existence. Guru's teachings and philosophy are very much relevant even today to fight against the evils of religious fundamentalism, terrorism, corruption and erosion of human values. Core principles of Indian Constitution such as Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, Secularism, Socialism and Fundamental Rights are aligned with Guru's philosophy Yet religious fundamentalism, caste discrimination, terrorism, corruption, deterioration of human values are on the ascent Ethics, morality and fair play are the lowest of priorities Popularizing Guru's ideals such as love for fellow beings, humility, sympathy, compassion, tolerance and integrity are the only answer to the present woes in society and to promote peace and harmony. He never make any shout, but asked people to work hard for progress. The result is the modern Kerala. His actions were for the emancipation of human life-the soul, mind and body. And thus he was a sage with a difference.

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